

RELAPSING FEVER (TICK BORNE)

What is relapsing fever?

Relapsing fever is an illness caused by a bacteria, a spirochete, which is carried by wild rodents and ticks. The ticks can remain infective for life and pass the infection on to the next generation.

Who gets relapsing fever?

Anyone can get relapsing fever who is bitten by an infected tick. Most cases in North America are reported in the western U.S. and Canada.

How is relapsing fever spread?

People get relapsing fever from the bite of an infected tick. There is no evidence of natural person-to-person transmission.

What are the symptoms of relapsing fever?

The disease causes a fever which lasts from 2-9 days and alternates with a period of 2-4 days without fever, after which fever returns. The number of relapses varies from 1-10 or more. The first onset of fever is often accompanied by a rash. Relapsing fever can be fatal if not treated.

How soon do symptoms usually appear?

The symptoms generally begin 8 days after the tick bite, but can appear as early as five and as late as 15 days after a tick bite.

How should a tick be removed?

Ticks should be removed promptly and carefully by using tweezers and applying gentle steady traction. Do not crush the tick's body when removing it and apply the tweezers as close to the skin as possible to avoid leaving tick mouth parts in the skin. Do not remove ticks with your bare hands. Protect your hands with gloves, cloth or tissue and be sure to wash your hands after removing a tick.

How can relapsing fever be prevented?

1. Avoid tick infested areas, especially during the warmer months.
2. Wear light colored clothing so ticks can be easily seen. Wear a long sleeved shirt, hat, long pants, and

tuck your pant legs into your socks.

3. Walk in the center of trails to avoid overhanging grass and brush.
4. Check your body every few hours for ticks when you spend a lot of time outdoors in tick infested areas. Ticks are most often found on the thigh, arms, underarms and legs. Ticks can be very small (no bigger than a pinhead). Look carefully for new "freckles".
5. Use insect repellents containing DEET on your skin or permethrin on clothing. Be sure to follow the directions on the container and wash off repellents when going indoors.
6. Remove attached ticks immediately.

Where can I get more information?

- Your personal doctor
- Your local health department, listed in the telephone directory
- The Utah Department of Health, Bureau of Epidemiology (801) 538-6191

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